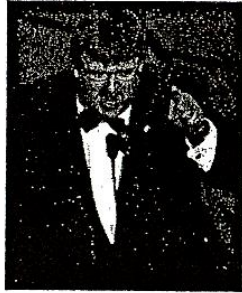


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AND THE OSCAR FOR ACTING OUT GOES TO . . .



Authors' note: This is not one of those books where an author attempts a psychiatric analysis based on inadequate training and limited experience with the person being studied. The authors in this case have no psychoanalytical training whatsoever and have never met the person under study.

With that disclaimer attached, one textbook disorder did pop to mind during our study of Michael Moore.

NARCISSISM

At risk of oversimplification: Freud, who defined the Narcissistic Personality Disorder, concluded that development of a normal human follows a certain path. In the womb, the infant is unconscious of any world beyond himself. Birth changes this: The baby suddenly feels hunger, cold, and diaper chafe.

At first, the infant still sees himself as the entire universe. His parents are viewed simply as extensions of himself, existing only to fulfill his needs and desires. Since the baby *is* the

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universe, his perceptions are the only reality. And of course, all gratifications of his desires must be immediate.

In terms of personality development, the narcissist stops right here. He (it is predominantly a male trait) remains the universe, surrounded by others who exist only as tools to fulfill his desires.

Objective measures of truth and the external world never register to a narcissist. Thus, meaning (of an event, a comment, anything) is determined solely by how it makes the narcissist *feel*. So while the adult narcissist has learned the shell of adult language, representations, and behavior, his interactions with others are severely stunted—he can only view people as tools that serve or oppose his wishes.

The American Psychiatric Association defines the disorder in these words: A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. *Has a grandiose sense of self-importance*

That's our boy! The only fellow (apart from prophets and evangelists) who has written a chapter in the almighty voice of God (Chapter 6 of *Dude, Where's My Country?* begins: "Hi. God here.").

As Dr. Sam Vaknin notes in his book *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*, "The narcissist never talks—he lectures." Moore was even unable to receive an Academy Award without delivering a lecture! Typically, on receipt of such a prestigious award, the honoree welcomes the opportunity to thank those who made his work possible. But gratitude runs directly counter to the narcissist's feelings of entitlement: The contributions of others are only what Moore

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deserves. Why share the glory by rewarding that which deserves no reward?

2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power . . .

That's Mike, again. In the 2000 elections, he backed Nader and then bragged to the world that Gore's campaign was begging him to abandon Nader and save them from disaster. In Moore's open letter to Gore, he chastises the former vice president: "Look, Al, you have screwed up—big time. . . . And now your people are calling ME, asking ME to do the job YOU'VE failed to do! Jeez, I've got enough on my plate these days, between work and the holidays coming up and the leaves I should be raking—and now I'm supposed to save YOU? Unbelievable!"

It's unbelievable, all right.

Never mind that Moore didn't seem particularly important to anyone during the presidential election cycle of 2000. As he recounts in *Stupid White Men*, when Moore tried to reach Nader on the telephone, he wound up talking to staffers; the most he could hope for was that the candidate was silently listening in: "I . . . was aware there was a chance the man himself was listening in." *Note to Mike:* If anyone *really* thinks you can carry a key state for them, they don't let staffers field your call; and if they are on the line, they aren't silent. Candidates, of all people, know what to kiss and when. If a fellow can deliver Michigan to them—or for that matter Idaho or Delaware—they grab the phone and pucker up.

And of course there is Moore's other grandiose plan. He joined the NRA so that he could have his supporters elect him as president of the organization—a campaign that would merely require 5 million or so Moorites to become life members, at a cost of \$750 each, and then cast a vote for

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him. (First things first: Moore should have checked out the process by which the NRA's president is elected—The vote is cast by the board of directors, not the organization's members.)

3. Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by (or associate with) other "special" or unique or high-status people (or institutions)

It is doubtful that anyone in the history of the human race has written as many "Open Letters" to major figures from George W. Bush and Al Gore, to Yasser Arafat. Where other authors might use an open letter to appeal to the recipient's better nature and encourage change, Moore's letters almost invariably berate and heckle his recipients, treating them as his inferiors.

An amusing insight: Dr. Vaknin points out that the narcissist often expects and feels entitled "to talk directly to authority figures (and not their assistants or secretaries)." And the plot of *Roger & Me* was . . .

4. Requires excessive admiration

For all his ego and mendacity, Moore is *immensely* popular. He's got an Oscar, more film awards than we can easily count, and a following whose blindest followers resemble cult members. Like a cult, the Moore movement shares the drive to recruit converts (we are informed that at least one university has made Bowling required viewing for all Freshman English students, and elsewhere many teachers have done the same on their own). The Moore Phenomenon is certainly widespread. And as we've seen over and over again, almost everyone who dares not to "excessively admire" Moore is attacked personally and viciously. Harlan Jacobson, one

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example from a long list, faced such a backlash from Moore after exposing the inaccuracies of *Roger & Me* that he withdrew from film criticism for a time.

5. Has a sense of entitlement, that is, unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic and full compliance with his or her expectations

Douglas Urbanski, his former Hollywood manager, told the *Times* of London how Moore was the only client he fired in writing. "Michael Moore would never withstand the scrutiny he lays on other people," Urbanski said.

One of Moore's employees at *TV Nation* was more blunt. "For the preservation of my own soul I have to consider him as just an entertainer," he explained, "because otherwise he's a huge asshole. If you consider him an entertainer, then his acting like a selfish, self-absorbed, pouty, deeply conflicted, easily wounded child is run-of-the-mill, standard behavior. But if he's a political force, then he's a jerk and a hypocrite. . . ."

Another example, drawn from the *New York Post*: during a speaking engagement at London's Roundhouse Theater, a petulant Moore launched into a tirade against the staff. He "stormed around all day screaming at everyone, even the 5 pound-an-hour bar staff, telling them how we were all con men and useless. Then he went on stage and did it in public." Moore apologized only after the staff essentially boycotted him, refusing even to open the doors to the public.

6. Is "interpersonally exploitative," that is, uses others to achieve his or her own ends

This is Moore, again, no doubt about it. Daniel Radosh summed it up in his 1997 *Salon* article: "Michael Moore is

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phenomenally good at one thing: getting people to make idiots of themselves on camera."

Moore's movies are littered with people he talks into an interview and then exploits, portraying them as crass or ignorant and using them to highlight his own superiority. The manner in which he wheedles Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*—pretending to be an NRA member wanting to drop by for a friendly talk and filming—is a classic example. Another is the way he suckered his then-friend Larry Stecco into appearing in *Roger & Me*, then edited the footage to make Stecco, an attorney devoted to helping the poor, look like a spokesman for the brainless and wealthy.

7. Lacks empathy, is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others

This is not just a personal lack of empathy. The narcissist *simply cannot understand* when he has fouled up or put his foot in his mouth socially because he cannot understand that other people may see things differently. His feelings are the universe and the only reality.

Moore has a long and sordid history of posting screeds that make anyone with the smallest capacity for empathy immediately cringe. The narcissist would rather be notorious than be ignored. Take, as an example, his "Open Letter to Elian Gonzalez," a tirade that appeared on his web site during 2000. In this case, he berates not Elian, but the mother who died trying to escape Cuba with him. She kidnapped him and placed his life in "horrible jeopardy," Moore writes to Gonzalez, adding, "The truth is your mother and her boyfriend snatched you and put you on that death boat because they simply wanted to make more money."

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At times Moore's insensitivity has even alienated those who would otherwise be considered supporters. In an interview with FoxNews.com columnist Roger Friedman, "South Park" co-creator Matt Stone lamented Moore's cruel mistreatment of Charlton Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*: "It's hard to make Heston look sympathetic, but Moore did it. You can't help but think this is an 80-year-old man with Alzheimer's. He looked so frail."

Moore responded in a different way to word of Heston's ailment: "[Heston] doesn't have Alzheimer's. He says he has Alzheimer's-like symptoms." The *New York Post* quoted Moore's response and summed it up nicely: "Moore doesn't quit while he's behind."

Precisely! This event and Moore's reaction to it are especially significant. We all frequently act out of self-interest; we all occasionally behave egocentrically or narcissistically. The difference is that most of us can perceive when we're behaving this way and retreat from dysfunction before it starts to define our personalities.

Moore's inability to recognize his own most egregious narcissistic lapses is very significant. Yes, Moore can't quit when he's behind—not out of stubbornness, but because he doesn't see that he's screwed up royally. His view is the only view, and people simply must see that—or they fall into the "nation of idiots."

8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her

In Moore's view, the world doesn't operate by cooperation, friendship, or loyalty. It is comprised of rats clawing their way to the top; and to succeed, one must tear down the other rats.

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If someone gets hurt in the process—Larry Stecco, Charlton Heston, whoever—tough. They would have done the same. (Could it be coincidence that Moore named his film production firm “Dog Eat Dog Productions?”)

Moore finds others envying him wherever he goes. In Flint, pure spite stopped the conservative town newspaper from praising his success. He complained to the Onion AV Club that “[t]he local paper in Flint has never written the words, ‘and he lives in a beautiful apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan,’ because the local paper in Flint hates me.”

Yet in the same interview, Moore also explained how his new, liberal neighbors in New York are also jealous of his success. “They never mention [the New York home] in Flint. But I’ll read it in the liberal publications. . . . They’re just pissed because they’re not sitting in this apartment.” The writers of these articles, he adds, are “grunts” at *Newsweek* or the *New Yorker*, and probably live in “a five floor walk-up down in the East Village.” So, continues Moore, “There’s a voice in their head, the voice of class, screaming, [adopts whining voice] ‘Not fair! Not fair!’”

Dr. Sam Vaknin outlines the essential envy component of narcissism: “The suppression of envy is at the CORE of the narcissist’s being. . . . If there are others out there who are better than he—he envies them, he lashes out at them ferociously, uncontrollably, madly, hatefully and spitefully.”

Moore’s long list of imagined rivals—the others he is constantly raging against—include former Vice President Al Gore, President George Bush, former NRA president Charlton Heston . . . not to mention the twelve pages he spends in *Stupid White Men* just running down (in both senses of the term) the current administration’s Cabinet.

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9. *Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes*

Celebrities, once they reach a certain strata of fame, are often capable of making income just by being celebrities. Moore is a classic example, as he's now giving lectures to colleges across the country for tens of thousands a pop.

Matt Hirsch, a Cornell student, saw this aspect of Moore when he protested Moore's fee (then only \$10,000) by presenting him with an oversized check in that amount, and pointed out that he'd charged more for a few hours of time than some teaching assistants were paid in a year.

It was, if anything, a classic Moore stunt. But Moore exploded. "Motherfucker. . . . You come down with your check making a big-ass statement," he shouted, according to the *Cornell Daily Sun*, "I give this money away to organizations I support . . ."

Moore's rabid anger, and his attempt to humiliate the student, illustrates yet another related aspect of narcissism. "The narcissist is seething with enmity and venom," Dr. Vaknin points out. The venom can appear explosively when the narcissist is challenged. When Moore's veracity was criticized by Joe Scarborough, a commentator and Florida congressman, Moore dug for dirt until he discovered that one of Scarborough's female aides had been found dead in his Congressional office (the coroner's ruling was heart attack). Moore then began telling his audiences that he had reserved the the internet domain name www.joescarboroughkilledhisintern.com, leaving them to guess what would be posted to it. (In fact, the site remains empty to this day—though it is owned by Moore's production company). He later told the *New Yorker* that his accusation of murder was "just kidding around." This did not stop him from hinting that

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Scarborough was a murderer, telling the reporter that the coroner was incompetent and asking her "Wasn't it strange that a twenty-eight-year-old girl who went running regularly should drop dead of a heart condition?" Apparently to Moore no conduct is too vile when it is directed at one who dares to question his stance.

In another college appearance, this time at Humboldt State University in California, Moore was asked by a reporter about small businesses being taken over by chain stores.

Moore replied with a bombastic, deeply personal rant against small business, replying that in Flint small businesses "supported all the right-wing groups." Moore, the anticorporate activist, was on a roll. "The small hardware salesman, the small clothing store salespersons, Jesse the Barber who signed his name three different times on three different petitions to recall me from the school board. Fuck all these small businesses—fuck 'em all! Bring in the chains. The small businesspeople are the rednecks that run the town and suppress [sic] the people. Fuck 'em all."

This display indicates a truly pathological degree of self-absorption. A fall-out with "Jesse the Barber," who dared defy Moore in a piddling squabble thirty years before, constitutes sufficient grounds to determine all issues relating to small businesses vs. chain stores.

One of the aspects of this haughtiness is the narcissist's feeling that he is above the law (the law is for *der unter-mensch!*), Moore's got that angle covered as well. As the *New York Times* has reported, although Moore was famous for bothering others, he apparently didn't care for being bothered himself. After Moore fired Alan Edelstein, Edelstein took a play from Moore's playbook and began following Moore with a videocamera, trying to corner him into an

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interview. "Mr. Moore responded by filing a complaint with the New York police accusing Mr. Edelstein of aggravated harassment, menacing and criminal trespassing," the *Times* article reported, and "As a result, Mr. Edelstein was arrested in March and spent nine hours in a cell at the Midtown North police station."

A narcissistic personality can have an even darker side, which Dr. Vaknin describes as a "burning desire, nay need, to be punished. In the grotesque mind of the narcissist, his punishment is equally his vindication. By being permanently on trial, the narcissist claims the high moral ground and the position of the martyr. . . ."

And Moore fits that bill. There's no question that he views his attacks on others (no matter how nasty or scurrilous) as a crusade, while others' criticism of him are character assassination and persecution.

Let's look again at a particularly conspicuous example: Moore's account of the police raid at his book-signing event for *Stupid White Men*. As Moore wrote, "I'm in San Diego, and I have just escaped being arrested by the San Diego police." He was signing books when he heard a commotion and saw people scattering. "The San Diego police are coming down the aisle, their large flashlights out [the auditorium lights are still on, so we all understand the implied 'other' use of these instruments]." The officers begin shouting threats: "'VACATE THESE PREMISES IMMEDIATELY OR YOU WILL ALL BE ARRESTED!' I cannot believe what I am hearing. 'YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE ANOTHER WARNING. LEAVE NOW—OR FACE ARREST!'"

Moore attempts to reason with the brutish officers and is told "I don't care what you are doing—this is your last warning. I am ready to arrest you and everyone else."

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Phew . . . in just a few paragraphs, Moore manages to expose a deep network of corruption and oppression brewing in the San Diego police department. Or is it that a larger force is at work—those nefarious henchmen of George W. Bush?

Unfortunately for Moore, one of the fans present at the event writes his own account, stating that he was astonished to read Moore's own description of the episode.

Kynn Bartlett gives a very different explanation of what happened. Sponsors of the book signing rented the auditorium until 11 P.M. As the magic hour approached, the janitors pointed out that they had to stay late and clean things up, so punctuality would be appreciated. Imposing on the working-class janitors was apparently of no concern to Moore, who according to Bartlett's account, kept on signing books after 11 P.M. came and went. After a while the janitors got fed up with waiting and called the police, two of whom showed up.

Bartlett describes the affair after the police arrived. Two officers came in, "and rather decent ones at that, doing an uncomfortable task." They announced the use permit for the event had expired, and everyone had to leave. "The cops didn't come off as abusive, but rather as matter-of-fact and straightforward," writes Kynn, "They didn't act like they were there to arrest droves of people for trespassing."

The narcissist alert is flashing throughout the San Diego episode. First, Moore has no concern for the janitors who understandably want to get home before midnight. Second, he has no idea that this imposition on them might have consequences—they're just supposed to sit there and take it. Third, Moore takes any opportunity—or in this case, fakes any opportunity—to play the martyr. Two polite cops telling him his time is up and he has to leave become in Moore's mind a pair of thugs, out to threaten and imprison (or even

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beat) him and his followers. And the discrepancy between the two accounts shows how easily Moore will take an episode that seemed innocent to one of his fans and spin it to play the persecuted martyr.

In our humble and nonprofessional opinions, Moore certainly resembles the walking textbook definition for Narcissistic Personality Disorder—and his millions of adoring fans (“Mike’s Militia,” as some have titled themselves) aren’t helping the case.

Ok, Mike, up off the couch. This session’s on the house.